

NOAA's new Administrator

—by Ilse Genovese



Confirmed in March as the new head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., is the first woman and the first marine ecologist to lead the Nation's top science agency for climate, oceans, and the atmosphere.

"Dr. Lubchenco is an outstanding and accomplished environmental scientist with a proven ability to communicate, lead a dynamic team, and inspire action," White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley said. "Dr. Lubchenco joins a distinguished group of scientific leaders in the Obama administration that will ensure that science plays its proper role in shaping policy."

With a budget of \$4 billion, and 12,800 employees in every U.S. state and locations around the world, NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

"I am truly honored and humbled to be part of the NOAA team," Lubchenco said. "With hard work and the best science as our guide, NOAA can spur the creation of new jobs and industries, revive our fisheries and the economies and communities they support, improve weather forecasting and disaster warnings, provide credible information about climate change to Americans, and protect and restore our coastal ecosystems."

Lubchenco, a Denver native, and a graduate of Colorado College, received her Master's degree from the University of Washington and Ph.D. from Harvard University in marine ecology. She taught at Harvard for two years and, prior to assuming her new duties as NOAA administrator, has been on the faculty at Oregon State University since 1977.

NOAA's new administrator is uniquely qualified to lead the agency—she is a top-flight scientist and a skilled policy maker. "Her years of public service with the National Academy of Sciences and the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and many other organizations have prepared her well for taking the helm of NOAA," said Co-chairman of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Admiral James D. Watkins.

The well known advocate for science takes the helm of NOAA at a time when the agency is poised to play a more prominent role as the administration tackles the issue of climate change. Lubchenco, who has conducted scientific studies of how global warming has affected the ocean, believes that the federal government should do more to curb

human-generated greenhouse gases. She thinks it is the responsibility of scientists to keep policy makers informed about the changes in the world's natural systems and the consequence of any intervention—without being "prescriptive."

"Good government depends on good science, but the role of science is to inform, not to dictate policy decisions," Lubchenco said. This is the message she has championed throughout her life, as founder of three groups that aim to communicate science to the public. One of them, the Leopold Leadership Program, teaches environmental scientists how they can best influence public policy making.

Because NOAA has a key role to play in providing fundamental knowledge about the climate and its changes, Lubchenco's first major initiative at NOAA is likely to be the establishment of a National Climate Service, loosely modeled on the National Weather Service. Funding for the initiative will come from the allocation NOAA will receive from the recently passed stimulus plan. Under this plan, a total of \$170 million is envisioned for climate change research and another \$230 million for habitat restoration and navigation projects.

President Obama's decision to choose a marine biologist to lead NOAA is in keeping with the agency's history of having scientifically oriented administrators. In the past, oceanographers, physicists, an admiral, a marine ecologist, and a public interest lawyer have headed the agency. The new NOAA administrator is a scientist who has worked tirelessly to bridge different fields—scientific, legislative, economic, and political. NOAA is in very capable hands, headed to achieve progress in all its stewardship areas.



Information sources: www.noaanews.noaa.gov; "NOAA set for larger policy role," by Juliet Eilperin, *The Washington Post*, March 21. Image credits: NOAA [top official photo] and Oregon State University.